

STATEMENT ON SB 13
December 3, 2015

Good Morning,

Thank committee

I am Tim Snow, Kalamazoo County Clerk & Register of Deeds, a position I have held since 1997. For 12 years prior to that, I was the Comstock Township Clerk.

I am here to encourage the committee to oppose SB 13, which would eliminate straight party voting in Michigan. I would like to present several reasons to support my position.

- It is important to note that about 45% of Michigan voters use the straight party option in general elections. The party split varies from county to county, but I believe Kalamazoo County is very similar to the State as a whole.
- In Kalamazoo County in 2012, the 19 cities and townships used the straight party option between 41.25% and 52.67%. Generally there are more Democratic Party straight party votes than there are Republican votes, but that also varies between jurisdictions and counties.
- In 2012, Kalamazoo County cast 124,185 ballots. Of those, 58,683 cast a straight party vote for one of the political parties.
- What we as clerks cannot determine is how many people cast a straight party vote and then vote for one or more candidates of another political party. The ability to split your ballot in a general election has been a part of election law for many years. This is an important provision in election law, and one that should be promoted.
- The most important issue that the State will need to deal with is the dramatic increase of the lines at each precinct.
- Michigan has a very long ballot in comparison to most states. In 2012, the City of Kalamazoo has a 2-page ballot because of a large number of proposals in the City. The occurrence of 2-page ballots is a very real possibility, leading to voters taking an even longer time to vote.
- Townships have far more offices to vote on than cities do in a general election.
- It has been estimated that it will take voters between 3 and 8 minutes to vote a ballot without the straight party designation.
- I would like to give an example of a couple of precincts in Kalamazoo County to show what happened in 2012.
 - Kalamazoo City, Precinct 2 is on the campus of Western Michigan University and takes in all the dormitories plus some additional area in the City. In a Presidential Election, nearly 3000 ballots are cast in the precinct and lines are a regular occurrence, because students often come to the polls between classes or at the end of the day in large groups. The City had to use 2 tabulators in the precinct in order to get everyone through in a reasonable time. This is not a recommended procedure, but in order to keep the lines at a reasonable length, it was the best solution for the situation.

- Prairie Ronde Township is a rural, but growing township in the southwest corner of the county. They have a large turnout in most elections, but they have a small township hall and no other public buildings that would be appropriate for a precinct. The Township Clerk does a very good job of organizing the precinct and parking lot, but is not unusual for lines to be zig-zagging through the gravel lot and the line goes down the road, which is a very dangerous situation, particularly in the evening.
- I offer this examples to show what already happens in some precincts. If SB 13 is passed, I am convinced that the lines in these and all precincts will be substantially increased, simply because it will take voters a much longer time to mark their ballots.
- Michigan already has the sixth longest lines at the polls in the US, according to a study funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, and done by a professor at MIT. We simply cannot increase our waiting times any more.
- Even if we are fortunate enough to get a "No Reason AV" law passed, it will not be enough to reduce the precinct lines to a manageable level.
- On a personal note, it is possible that the elimination of straight party voting would be better for me in my re-election effort next year. However, it is far more important that the voters have a good election experience.
- Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you today.

No Reason AV